

There will be no greater measure of your commitment to the health of our children or the future of our Nation.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Statement on the Death of James B. McDougal

March 8, 1998

I am saddened to learn about Jim McDougal's death today. I have good memories of the years we worked together in Arkansas, and I extend my condolences to his family.

Remarks to the American Medical Association National Leadership Conference

March 9, 1998

Thank you very much for that warm welcome. And thank you, Dr. Wootton. He was giving his talk, and I was listening, and I was thinking: I agree with all that; there's nothing left for me to say. If I knew a couple of funny stories, I could just tell them and leave and thank you for the opportunity. *[Laughter]*

Dr. Dickey, congratulations on being the president-elect. Dr. Reardon, thank you for serving on the Advisory Commission on Consumer Protection and Quality. Dr. Smoak, thank you for telling me there's nothing incompatible between a doctor named "Smoke" and a campaign against tobacco. *[Laughter]* Dr. Jensen, ladies and gentlemen.

I am honored to be here and to be working with the AMA on so many important fronts. We have, in the past, sometimes had honest differences on policy but have always agreed on our profound obligation to the health of our Nation's families. We're walking together in a step-by-step approach to health care reform, expanding the promise of new medical technologies, extending health care opportunities to the most vulnerable Americans.

Together we've helped Americans to keep their health coverage when they change jobs or someone in their families gets sick. And in last year's balanced budget agreement we

helped to make sure that up to 5 million uninsured children will get the medical coverage they deserve and the help they need, with the biggest increase in health coverage for children since 1965.

We have worked to increase medical research and to support greater efforts at preservation and care for conditions from breast cancer to diabetes. Last year, in our balanced budget plan, the diabetes component was said by the American Diabetes Association to be the most important advance in the treatment and care of diabetes since the discovery of insulin.

We found the right family doctor for America, Dr. David Satcher, our new Surgeon General. Last month your voices were strong and united in support of his nomination, and I thank you, and America's families thank you. The lesson of these endeavors is that when we work together, we can get things done.

This is a very great moment for America on the edge of a new century, a new millennium, and a completely new economy and new global society. We see dramatic changes in the way our people work and live and relate to each other and the rest of the world. Our economy is the strongest it's been in a generation. In 5 years, we have 15 million new jobs, the lowest unemployment rate in 24 years, the lowest inflation rate in 30 years, the highest homeownership rate in the history of the country. Our social problems are on the mend. Crime is at its lowest rate in 24 years. The welfare rolls are the lowest in 27 years. Teen pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births are declining. Our leadership is unrivaled around the world as we work for peace and freedom and security.

Still, as I said in the State of the Union Address, these good times do not give us the opportunity to rest or withdraw. Instead, if we are wise, we will use this as a time to act and to build, to secure our prosperity and strengthen our future, first of all, by not spending this budget surplus we waited 30 years for before it exists and putting Social Security first, saving Social Security for the 21st century so that the baby boom generation does not either bankrupt Social Security

or bankrupt their children and their retirement. That's what we should do before we spend that surplus.

This is a time to widen the circle of opportunity. That's what we're doing with adding 5 million children to the health care rolls. In spite of the fact that we have a 4.6 percent unemployment rate, there's still neighborhoods, mostly in urban America, sometimes in rural America, where the recovery has not yet been felt. And our greatest opportunity to continue to grow the economy with low inflation is to bring the miracles of free enterprise and high technology into these neighborhoods that have not yet felt them.

We also have to look at our long-term challenges. And I'll just mention two or three that go beyond health care but will affect you, your children, and your grandchildren. First, as the recent International Math and Science Test results for seniors showed, we may have the best system of college education in the world, and we have now opened the doors of college to everyone with tax credits and scholarships and work-study provisions and community service provisions, but no one seriously believes we have the best system of elementary and secondary education in the world. And we must keep working to raise standards and increase accountability and increase performance until we do have the best system of elementary and secondary education in the world.

Second, we have to recognize that what you do for a living, worry about people's health, is going to increasingly be affected by global development. Global travel patterns have given us something called "airport malaria" now, a phenomenon no one ever knew about. And we have to recognize furthermore that a lot of what we deal with in health care will be affected by the overall condition of the environment. That's why the issue of global climate change is so important. We have malaria now at higher altitudes than ever before recorded because of climate change. A lot of you are probably noticing as you hear from me that your allergies are a little worse in the springtime with El Niño, even in Washington, when you don't think it could ever be any worse than it is normally. So we have to deal with the climate change issue.

We have to deal with the problems of weapons of mass destruction. Even as we reduce the nuclear threat, we see on the horizon the prospect that small-scale nuclear weapons or biological or chemical weapons in the hands of terrorists, drug traffickers, organized criminals, rogue states, could change the whole future of security for our children. We have to cooperate more with other countries for peace and prosperity around the world.

In a few days, I'm going to Africa, and I will be the first sitting American President ever to visit the nations in Africa where I'm going to visit. But they're a big part of our future, economically, politically, and in terms of our shared concerns over health and environmental matters.

Now, I'd like you to see the particular issues I want to discuss today in this larger context. Are we doing what we should be doing to prepare this country for a new century, to widen the circle of opportunity, to strengthen the bonds that unite us together, to reenforce our values, to make our freedom mean more in the future? All of these issues should be seen against that background.

This is a moment of great promise, but it's also a moment of great obligation. Every American decisionmaker, including all the Members of the Congress, but all the rest of us as well, must decide whether we believe that. Because when times are good, the easiest thing to do is to relax, enjoy it, express relief.

If anybody told me the day I took office as President that in 5 years the stock market would go from 3200 to 8500 and we'd have 15 million new jobs and almost two-thirds of the American people would be in their own homes, and all the other things, I would have said, "maybe, but probably not." Having achieved that, and having stepped on all the hot coals that were necessary to get from where we were then to where we are now, it is easy for people to say, "Well, let's relax." That would be a terrible mistake. That's the number one message I have today. We have to move. Prosperity and confidence give us the freedom of movement that we have to seize. We have to move. This is not a time to sit still. It's a time to bear down and go forward, and we need your help.

Now, there are fewer than 70—70—working days left in Washington before Congress adjourns. Now, this is an election year, and the work schedule is always somewhat shorter in an election year, and that's understandable. But it's unusually limited this year. How will the 105th Congress go down in history? I want it to go down in history as a Congress that saved lives by passing the Patient's Bill of Rights, by passing tough and sweeping tobacco legislation, by passing the Research Fund for the 21st Century with its big increase in medical research, and extending health care coverage to those who presently are uninsured. That's what I want this Congress to go down with.

The next 70 days will tell the tale. Will this Congress go down in history as one that passed landmark legislation to save lives and strengthen America for the new century, or one that was dominated by partisan election year politics?

The calendar tells us that this is an election year. That's a good thing; we need one every now and then. *[Laughter]* Have the debates and have the discussion. But as I have told every Member of Congress in both parties with whom I have discussed this, no matter how much we get done this year there will still be things at the end of the year on which honorable people in both parties disagree, more than enough over which to have an honest, fruitful, meaty election. This election should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the American people want it to be not only an election year but a productive legislative year for the health and welfare of our country and our future.

Dr. Wootton has already talked about the Patient's Bill of Rights, but I want to say a few things about it. Because my mother was a nurse anesthetist, I grew up around doctors from the time I was a little boy. They were the first professional people that I ever knew. Most of them were the kind of people we'd all like our children to grow up to be. They were hard-working, able, kind, caring people. Most doctors today are as well. But the world of medical practice is very different today than it was 40 years ago, when I first started looking at it though the eyes of a child—not altogether worse, of course. There are many things that are better. We have higher

life expectancy, the lowest infant mortality rate we've ever recorded, the highest rate of childhood immunization, dramatic advances in medicines and medical technologies and all kinds of treatments.

We also have more than 160 million Americans in managed care plans. And while there have been some problems with them, all of us have to be glad when health care costs don't go up at 4 or 5 times the rate of inflation.

Still, it's often harder for you just to be doctors. When a doctor spends almost as much time with a bookkeeper as with a patient, something is wrong. If you have to spend more time filling out forms than making rounds, something is wrong. And most important to me, when medical decisions are made by someone other than a doctor and something other than the best interests of the patient is the bottom line, then something is wrong. I think we should have a simple standard: traditional care or managed care, every American deserves quality care.

We all have our stories, and yours are more firsthand and perhaps fresher than mine, but I never will forget reading a few weeks ago about a woman who worked in an oncologist's office to verify insurance coverage and get authorizations for medical procedures, who told us the story of a 12-year-old boy with a cancerous tumor in his leg. The doctor wanted to perform a procedure to save the boy's leg, but the health plan said no. It seems that for that condition, the only approved procedure was amputation. And that was the only procedure the plan would pay for. The child's parents appealed the decision, but they were turned down. They appealed again and were turned down again. Only when the father's employer weighed in did the health plan change its mind. By then, it was too late, the boy's cancer had spread, and amputation was the only choice left. Of course, it was covered by the health plan.

That is a choice no family should have to make. If the doctor had been able to do the right thing, the child would have been better off, and the system would have been better served.

We have the best trained, best skilled doctors in the world, the best medical education,

the best medical technology. We're all getting a lot smarter than we used to be about prevention. The first thing your president said to me is, "I'm a cardiologist. Take this golf club, and stay in good shape." [Laughter] We're getting better at it. But it is madness to strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. And it happens, over and over and over again.

There are no fewer than 500 stories that could come up in this audience right now within a half an hour not all that different from the one I just told. That is what we seek to address. That's what the Patient's Bill of Rights is all about, to put medical decisions back into the hands of doctors and their patients. I have already acted, as your president said, to ensure that Federal employees and their families, military personnel, veterans and their families, everyone on Medicare and Medicaid, altogether about a third of our people, are covered by the Patient's Bill of Rights.

And across our Nation, State legislators and Governors, both Republican and Democratic, are doing what they can. Forty-three States have enacted into law one or more of the basic provisions of the Patient's Bill of Rights. But State laws and the patchwork of reforms can't protect most Americans. At least 140 million of them are without basic protection. That's why we need the Federal Patient's Bill of Rights with the full force of Federal law.

The Hippocratic oath binds doctors, and I quote, "to follow that method of treatment which according to my ability and judgment I consider for the benefit of my patient." That is your responsibility, and should be your patient's right: to know all the medical options, not just the cheapest; primary care when possible, specialists when necessary. That's why the Patient's Bill of Rights lifts the gag order on our Nation's doctors and allows patients to follow your best recommendations by appealing unfair decisions by managed care accountants.

Patients also should have a right to keep their medical records confidential. Doctors must feel free to write down the whole truth without it ending up on the Internet or in the hands of employers and marketing firms or increasing a patient's insurance rates.

Again, the Hippocratic oath says, "all such shall be kept secret." That's why the Patient's Bill of Rights safeguards the sanctity of the doctor-patient relationship. Patients have a right to emergency services wherever and whenever they need it. And when the EMT's are wheeling a new arrival into the emergency room, the last thing you or the patient should have to worry about is the fine print on the health plan.

Again I say, there are less than 70 days remaining in this legislative session, but there is broad bipartisan support in this Congress for this legislation. We have acted in our administration; states have acted; the AMA has acted. You must impress upon the Congress the urgency of passing this legislation. Believe me, a majority of the Congress, a huge majority in both Houses and Members of both parties, are for this. It is just a question of mustering the will to get the job done and going through some of the very difficult issues around the edges that have to be resolved. But there is utterly no reason not to do this this year. You can get it done if you work at it.

The other great issue before the Congress in health care is, of course, tobacco. Now, you're right, Dr. Wootton, I did read "The Journal of the American Medical Association" special edition on tobacco. I read it all from start to finish. And it was a great service to me and to the American people, and I thank you very much for it.

Again, you can argue about some of the fine print, but the big picture is clear: Every single day, even though it is illegal in every State in America, 3,000 kids start to smoke; 1,000 of them will die earlier because of it. This amounts to a national epidemic and a national tragedy. You know as well as I do that more people die from smoking-related illnesses every year than from most other things that cause death in America put together. As physicians, you also know that in the end, the only way that we have to deal with this today with absolute conviction is with preventive care: Don't do it in the first place.

Now, for more than 5 years, we have worked to stop our children from smoking before they start. We launched a nationwide campaign with the FDA to educate children

about the dangers of smoking, to reduce access of children to tobacco products, to put a stop to tobacco companies that spend millions mass-marketing to our young people.

Last fall I asked the Congress to pass comprehensive, bipartisan legislation to reduce teen smoking by raising the price of cigarettes up to a dollar and a half a pack over the next several years, imposing strong penalties on tobacco companies that keep on advertising to children, and giving the FDA full authority to regulate children's access to tobacco products.

If we do this, we can cut teen smoking by almost half in 5 years. We can stop almost 3 million children from taking that first drag. We can prevent almost one million premature deaths. But again, the clock is ticking.

And yes, there are lots of complicated issues. You know, because this is a five- or six-part package, there are several committees and subcommittees involved. And because there is some controversy around the edges about how much money should be raised how quickly from the tobacco tax and what it should be spent on, there are some difficult issues to be resolved. And yes, I know that there are only 70 days. But if we know that the lives of 1,000 children a day are at stake, how can we walk away from this legislative session without a solution to the tobacco issue?

There are two other issues I'd like to mention to you. The first relates to Medicare. This week—or, excuse me—last week, I attended the first meeting of the Bipartisan Medicare Commission appointed by the leaders of the House and the Senate and the White House to look for long-term reform for Medicare for the 21st century. As you know, we have secured the Medicare Trust Fund for another decade with some very difficult decisions. But there are a lot of unresolved issues out there, and in some ways the complexity of the Medicare problem is greater than the complexity of the Social Security problem. At least it has to be dealt with sooner in time. So I want to urge your support for the Medicare Commission and your involvement in it.

I also have made a specific proposal with regard to Medicare that I believe should be passed this year without regard to the work

of the Medicare Commission, and I ask you to carefully review it, and I hope you'll support it. It would give a vulnerable group of Americans, displaced workers 55 and over—people who either voluntarily take early retirement, and they're promised health care, but the promise is broken, or people who are laid off, and they can't find another job, and they lose their job-related health insurance—and other seniors, principally people who are married to folks who lose their old health insurance because they start being covered by Medicare, but they're not old enough to be on Medicare so they lose the family coverage, and they don't have anything—it would take this group of Americans and give them the chance to buy into Medicare at cost.

The Congressional Budget Office just reported that the policy will cost even less and will benefit even more people than we in our administration had estimated, and agreed with us that it will have no burden whatever on the Medicare Trust Fund. It will not shorten the life of the Trust Fund, nor will it complicate in any way our attempts at the long-term reform of Medicare. We're talking about somewhere between three and four hundred thousand people that are just out there, that had health insurance and now don't have any—at a particularly vulnerable time in their lives. So I hope you will support that.

The second thing I'd like to ask for your support for involves a project that Hillary has worked very hard on to sort of leave some gifts for our country in the new millennium. The project motto is "Honoring our past and imagining our future." Among other things, we're working with the Congress to get the funds necessary to save, for example, the Star-Spangled Banner, which is in terrible shape. We need to spend, believe it or not, \$13 million to restore the flag and to make sure that the 200 years of lighting don't destroy the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and to try to get every community in the country to find those things in each community which are most important to their history and save them.

But we're also looking at the future. And perhaps the most important thing about the

future-oriented nature of this project is the Research Fund for the 21st Century, which has a huge increase in research for all forms of scientific research and development but especially have the largest increase in funding for the NIH in history and doubling the funding for the National Cancer Institute.

We are on the verge of unlocking a number of medical mysteries, as you know. Last year, for example, we had the first sign of movement in the lower limbs of laboratory animals with severed spines. The human genome project is proceeding at a rapid pace, with implications which still stagger the imagination. Again I say, we have the money to do this. We can do this within the balanced budget. And while there may not be time to resolve every issue I'd like to see resolved in this Congress, we should nail down now this Research Fund for the 21st Century. There has been terrific support, in the Republican as well as in the Democratic caucuses. This has not been a partisan issue. It is just the question of getting the job done in the next 70 days.

So while you're here, let me say again, a big part of building America for the 21st century is building a healthier America and building an America where people feel secure with the health care they have, and they feel it has integrity. We need the Patient's Bill of Rights. We need action on the tobacco front. We need reform of Medicare long term. We need to help these people that are falling between the gaps because they're not old enough yet. And we need to continue in an intensified way our commitment to research. Let us take the benefit of our prosperity and finally having a balanced budget and invest the kind of money in research that we know—we know—will ensure benefits beyond our wildest imagination.

We can do all this in the next 70 days, but to do it we'll have to do it together. I need your help. Your patients need you help. Your country will be richly rewarded if you can persuade the Congress to act in these areas.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:58 a.m. in the ballroom at the Sheraton Washington Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Dr. Percy Wootton, president, Dr. Nancy Dickey, president-elect, Dr.

Thomas Reardon, chairman of the board, Dr. Randolph Smoak, vice chairman of the board, and Dr. Lynn E. Jensen, chief executive officer and interim vice president, American Medical Association.

Remarks at Housatonic Community-Technical College in Bridgeport, Connecticut

March 10, 1998

Thank you very much. First of all, I think Pamela did a terrific job with her speech. And secondly, when Anthony stood up, I thought to myself, in a few years Congressman Shays will be retiring, and I—[*laughter*—may be looking at his successor right there. He was great. [*Laughter*] I love it. Senator Dodd, you might want to hire him as a consultant this year. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Mayor, I'm delighted to be back in Bridgeport with you and Jennifer and the officials of the city government. I thank Senator Dodd and Congressman Shays and Representatives Barbara Kennelly and Rose DeLauro for joining us today; Attorney General Blumenthal, Treasurer Paul Sylvester, Speaker Ritter and members of the legislature.

Like Senator Dodd, I want to extend my condolences on behalf of Hillary and myself to the families of the victims of the shooting incident in Newington, and our prayers are with them.

And like Senator Dodd, on a happier note, I want to congratulate Connecticut for getting both its teams into the NCAA. [*Laughter*] So did Arkansas. [*Laughter*] Thank goodness we don't have a contest anytime soon. And what Senator Dodd didn't say is that UCONN's men's team is actually playing in Washington this week. And so I think you all should keep score and see which Members of your congressional delegation show up to root the home team on. [*Laughter*]

I'm glad to be back in Bridgeport. I really like this community, and I have admired the courage with which the people here have struggled in the tough years and moved to move the community forward. I should tell you, whenever I come to a place you all notice that there are a few members of the press who come with me. [*Laughter*] And

sometimes it seems that we're on opposite sides of the line, but you should know that one member of the press, Larry McQuillan, who works for Reuters New Service, and is actually the president of the White House Press Corps this year, is from Bridgeport. He will write a totally biased, favorable story—[laughter]—about this wonderful college and child care program today, I can assure you.

I want to thank President Wertz for showing me around the school and the unbelievable art collection here, which you should be very proud of. And I want to thank Marie Nulty for taking me through the wonderful preschool program.

In the "Early Childhood Lab Schools Parent Handbook" there is the following quote: "A child is like a butterfly in the wind. Some can fly higher than others, but each one flies the best it can. Each one is special. Each one is different. Each one is beautiful." After going through this child care center, it seems to me that that is a motto that every teacher I saw lived and worked by, and that every child I met was made to feel special every day.

The reason I came here today is twofold: First of all, because of the extraordinary leadership for children and especially on the child care center issue—child care issue, of Senator Dodd, along with the Members of your House delegation who are here, who have been terrific on this issue; and second, because what I see here today is what I believe every child in America needs, and it's important that we graphically demonstrate to the country that with so many parents in the work force are going back to school, there is a crying unmet need which the mayor graphically and numerically demonstrated in his remarks just here in Bridgeport, all over the country for the kind of high quality child care that you offer here.

Today we have to make a commitment to extend that option to every family in America that needs it. I want to talk about what we in the Federal Government can do on our own to improve child care at Federal centers, but most importantly, I want to talk about what Congress should do in the next 70 days to help every working family give their children the kind of child care we see here.

As has been said already, these are good times for America. We have 15 million new jobs, the lowest unemployment rate in 24 years, the lowest inflation rate in 30 years, the highest homeownership rate in history, the lowest welfare rolls in 27 years, the lowest crime rate in 24 years. And I'm proud of it. These numbers only matter insofar as they reflect differences in the lives of ordinary Americans—a different life story that can be told. The reason I was proud to be introduced by Pamela Price is that she embodies the changing story of America over the last 5 years, and that's what we want for every American who's willing to work for it.

In last year's historic balanced budget agreement we provided a child care tax credit of \$500 per child for families; expanded health care coverage to 5 million more children in lower income working families who don't have access to it now; and perhaps most important, have virtually opened the doors of college to all Americans. For example—and you can compare it, what it means here at Housatonic—in the last years we have added 300,000 work-study slots, hundreds of thousands of more scholarships; we've made the interest on student loans tax deductible; 100,000 young people have worked their way through college or earned money for college by serving in AmeriCorps in community service projects. You can now save for a college education in an IRA and withdraw from the IRA tax free if the money is used for a college education. But most important, now there is a \$1,500 tax credit—that's not a deduction, a credit—a reduction of your tax bill for the first 2 years of college, and a lifetime learning credit that is substantial, but not quite that large for junior and senior years, for job training programs, for graduate schools. I think we can really say that insofar as community-based institutions like this are concerned, we have opened the doors of college to all Americans who are willing to work for it. And that is a profoundly important achievement for our country.

Senator Dodd talked about what the Family and Medical Leave Act means. The American dream is now in reach for more and more families. And that is a very, very good thing. But as you heard Pamela say, what

made all this work for her as she was struggling to put her life on track was knowing that her child would be in a safe, healthy, positive child care environment. And if we really want to open the doors of opportunity to all Americans, we not only have to finish our agenda of bringing job opportunities and business opportunities into every neighborhood and every city like Bridgeport in America, we have to make sure that if the jobs and the educational opportunities are open, the parents can actually go without having to worry that they're neglecting their children.

We can never have a country that is fully successful if millions of people every day get up and look forward to a day in which they are terrified that they will have to make a choice between being a responsible parent and a good worker or a good student. If we have to choose, we lose. Society has no more important work than raising children. If everyone did that successfully, I think we would all agree we'd have less than half the problems we have today.

On the other hand, this economic boom we celebrate was fueled by having nearly two-thirds of the American adults in the work force, the highest percentage of people in the work force in history. That's how you get a low unemployment rate. Well, by definition, a lot of those folks are parents with children who have to be supervised and nourished and supported and helped.

So when you think about this child care issue, if you look at it the way I do, not just as President, but as a parent and as someone who's worked all his life, I say to myself, we cannot have a country that asks people to make a choice between succeeding at home and succeeding at work, and insofar as we have to choose, we lose. When we know we can succeed at home and at work because of an effective child care center, every American wins. The country wins. We're stronger in the 21st century; our families are stronger; our economies are stronger; they reinforce each other. That's really what this child care issue is all about.

Now, we've worked hard on this for the last 5 years. We've helped a million more parents to pay—or the parents of a million more children to pay for child care. But obvi-

ously—remember the mayor's numbers for Bridgeport—there is a huge amount of work to be done here. And today we're releasing a report that confirms the overwhelming need still existing all across America. The report shows that States have come up with a lot of innovative ideas, and the Congress allocated \$4 billion more to States for child care as a part of welfare reform. But even with all that, it is clear that the resources are simply not there yet to meet the needs of all the families in America. States have been forced to turn away literally thousands upon thousands of low-income families.

In Connecticut, the State Child Care Bureau has to restrict its aid to families on welfare or teen parents in high school. They've actually stopped taking applications from families that are so-called “working poor” altogether.

So here we are at a time of unprecedented prosperity, when people at the lower end of the income scale are finally beginning to get pay raises and have some security in their jobs, but we know they can't afford quality child care without help. So here we are at a time, the best of times for our country, and yet we still have millions of people getting up every day going to work worrying about their children. We are forcing them to make choices that no family should have to make, that no country should tolerate, and that we will pay for down the road sooner or later. So what we want to do is pay for it now, the right way and have a good, positive environment.

Now, let me say some of the things that I intend to do with the Federal child care centers. We care, the Federal Government cares in its child care centers for some 215,000 children—quite a few. We want them to be a model for the Nation. Today I'm going to direct my Cabinet to do four things:

First, to make all the centers fully accredited by the year 2000. Now, what does that mean, in terms of quality of facilities, training for workers and child-to-staff ratios? Today, believe it or not, 76 percent of our military child care centers are already accredited, but only 35 percent of our non-military centers are. We'll make both categories 100 percent in the next 700 days.

Second, we have to make sure that all the centers conduct thorough background checks on workers. In too many States there is no checking to see if the people we trust with our children are even trustworthy in the eyes of the law. Connecticut is one of the few States that actually does require a criminal background check of child care workers. Every State should do it, and the Federal Government should certainly do it.

Third, we have to make sure that all Federal workers know about all their child care benefits and options in the first place.

And finally, we're going to do more work with the private sector to make Federal child care better and more affordable. If we do all that, there will still be millions of kids out there and their parents who need help. In the balanced budget I have presented to Congress for this year, I've proposed a comprehensive and responsible plan to strengthen child care. There will be other proposals to do the same thing.

Now, Congress is only going to meet about 70 more days this year. I know you say, "Well, it's only March," but anyway that's—in Washington, Congress plans to only sit about 70 more days. Now, there is enormous support, I believe, among people in both parties in our country and, I believe, among people in both parties in the Congress for taking action on child care. I have a plan, and there are others which would double the number of children receiving child care subsidies, at a million or more new kids, give tax cuts to businesses which provide child care, expand child care tax credits to 3 million working families, and improve the standards of child care centers and provide more funds to train—adequately train—workers in child care centers.

Now, we're not talking about peanuts here. Let me tell you what we're talking about. The tax credits that we will offer, if Congress would pass them, would mean that a family of four living on up to \$35,000 a year that has high child care bills would not pay any Federal income tax. That would be a terrific incentive to help working families afford quality child care. And for lower income working families who don't owe any Federal income tax anyway, if we increase the block grant going to the States, it goes to subsidized

care for lower income working families, plus the money that we have given the States for people moving from welfare to work—we will be able to make a huge dent in this problem.

If Congress acts, we can make child care safer as well as more affordable. We can even give scholarships under our plan to talented caregivers to train more people. We also can expand after school programs to keep 500,000 more kids, when they get a little older, off our streets and out of trouble after school. I think that's very important. As I said, there are only 70 days left. There are always, with something this big, some controversy around the edges of the issue. But all these things can be resolved if the Congress will make up its mind to act. Because these 70 days of meetings where they can vote will be spread over most of the year. There's still time for committee meetings, for staff to do their work, for all that kind of stuff to happen. We can do this. We do not need to wait another year just because this is an election year to pass this. We need to do this now.

The other thing I want to say that's related to this, is that Congress must pass comprehensive tobacco legislation to reduce teen smoking and raise the price of cigarettes by up to a dollar and a half a pack, impose strong penalties on companies that continue to advertise to children, and give the FDA full authority to regulate tobacco products and children's access to them. The revenues we raise from the tobacco company would help to make a partial contribution to the child care plan that I have proposed as well.

Again I say, there's some controversy—there's some issues that have to be resolved in this tobacco settlement, to get the legislation. But I want to, again, graphically illustrate—I just watched all those little kids in that room, those two rooms, these beautiful children—every single day, even though it is illegal in every State in America, 3,000 more children begin to smoke; 1,000 of those 3,000 children will die sooner because of that decision. Hardly anybody becomes a chronic, lifetime smoker who does not start in their teenage years.

So I know there are only 70 days left, and I know this is a big bill. But I know that

there are Democrats and Republicans in substantial numbers who want to do this. We should not let the calendar get in the way of the urgent need for action. We can pass the child care reforms, and we can fund them. And we can pass the tobacco legislation, and we must. Just think about it: 1,000 kids every day that wants—just like all these children did in here. Just think about it, every single day. There is no need to wait. There is no excuse for waiting. The time to act is now.

I leave you with this thought. I'm glad you clapped when I said these are good times for America. And you ought to be proud of yourselves, because the whole country helped to create these good times. And the efforts that we make in different areas, from the economy to crime to welfare reform to early childhood to health and education, they all reinforce each other. But sometimes when times are good and people clap and they feel good, they relax. I tell you, when times are good but challenges are large and the future is coming at you like a fast train down a track—and that's how the 21st century is coming at you, with things changing more rapidly than ever before—then an obligation is imposed to use the good times to act, not to relax.

So I say to all of you, the Members of Congress who are here are ready to act, so give them all a pat on the back, but do everything you can to send a clear and unambiguous signal that you do not want the election year to be a relaxation year; you want it to be a legislating year for the children of this country to make them stronger in the new century. After all, it's only 700 days away. Let's spend 70 days to make sure that in 700 days we'll have the healthiest, strongest children in the history of our Nation.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:30 a.m. in the Performing Arts Building. In his remarks, he referred to Pamela A. Price, a student with a child in the college's child care program, who introduced the President, and her son, Anthony; Mayor Joseph P. Ganim of Bridgeport, and his wife, Jennifer; State Attorney General Richard Blumenthal; State Treasurer Paul Sylvester; Thomas D. Ritter, speaker, State House of Representatives; Janis M. Wertz, president,

Housatonic Community-Technical College; and Marie Nulty, director, Early Childhood Laboratory School. The President also referred to an incident on March 6, 1998, in Newington, CT, in which an employee of the State Lottery Commission entered the commission's headquarters and killed four officials and then turned the gun on himself.

Memorandum on Steps To Improve Federally Sponsored Child Care *March 10, 1998*

Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies

Subject: Steps to Improve Federally Sponsored Child Care

Now more than ever, America's working parents are struggling to balance their obligations to be good workers—and their more important obligations to be good parents. By choice or by financial necessity, millions of Americans rely on child care to care for their children for part of each day. Parents deserve to know that their children are safe and nurtured in child care.

One of my highest priorities is to make child care better, safer, and more affordable. That is why my balanced budget includes the most significant investment in child care in our Nation's history and proposes specific measures to improve child care quality.

As a supplier of child care and as an employer that must recruit and retain a strong workforce, the Federal Government should lead the way in improving child care. I am proud that our military has developed one of the finest child care delivery systems in the world, and that the Department of Defense, at my request, is sharing its expertise with the public and private sectors. Still, we need to do more. The executive branch of the Federal Government has responsibility for over 1,000 child care centers—788 through the military, 109 through the General Services Administration, and 127 through other Federal departments. In addition, the military oversees nearly 10,000 professional family child care providers. In total, approximately 215,000 children are in our care.

Today I am directing my Administration to take significant new steps to improve the